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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: AT CUBA'S INDEPENDENT LIBRARIES, UNCENSORED DEBATE

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Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly for Reason 1.4(d)

11. (C) Summary: Cuba's outlawed Assembly to Promote Civil Society (ASPC), led by Martha Beatriz Roque, launched its "Congress" of independent librarians October 10 and reported successful meetings in at least six provinces. APSC said 153 independent libraries are taking part in the four-and-a-half-month-long event, which is aimed at encouraging Cubans to "retake the initiative in the peaceful struggle for democracy." Not surprisingly in this atomized, totalitarian state, the start of the Congress was tarnished by acts of repression and snubs from others in the human rights community, including the "Ladies in White." End Summary.

12. (C) Martha Beatriz Roque told us October 11 that on the first day of the Congress, independent librarians, other activists and ordinary Cubans took part in discussions, book reviews, forums and other events across the island. One event at the Havana home of Felix Bonne, one of the 75 activists jailed in 2003 (but later freed on health grounds) drew 50 or 60 people. (Note: This number could be inflated by the fact that alcohol was served, to celebrate a relative's birthday. End Note.) A meeting in Cienfuegos allegedly attracted 15 people, while in Camaguey, eight adults and two children visited an independent library. In Santa Clara, hundreds of communist militants, many of them young men wearing sports gear, staged an "act of repudiation" in front of the home of dissident and independent librarian Noelia Pedraza, but produced no injuries. However, in Ranchuelo, Villa Clara province, a dissident was reportedly struck in the head by a militant in a Congress-related incident.

"LADIES" DISTANCE THEMSELVES

13. (C) Roque described as "sabotage" an October 9 statement from the leadership of the "Ladies in White" - relatives of political prisoners - which states: "We are not members of any project, organization or party, and thus we will not participate in the librarian Congress." This followed a September 26 statement by APSC that the Congress would feature, among other activities, a conference with relatives of political prisoners, including inviting "some of the esteemed Ladies in White, so that the public can hear first-hand the terrible situations" of political prisoners and their families. APSC was also stung by a statement by longtime independent librarian and dissident Gisela Delgado Sablon, saying she would not participate in the Congress.

¶4. (C) Roque accused Delgado of working for State Security and referred to rumors, as yet unsubstantiated, that Delgado's political-prisoner husband, Hector Palacio, had been spotted walking around in public. Roque also asserted that the Ladies' statement did not reflect the will of the group but rather that of Miriam Leyva, an influential Lady (and Delgado ally) who has frequently clashed with Roque. (Note: Another leading Lady, Laura Pollan, told us that the statement idea was discussed and agreed upon by a group of Ladies. End Note.) "Some people don't like the Assembly because the Assembly actually does things," said Roque, whose group held an historic meeting in May 2005 attended by roughly 150 pro-democracy activists.

FARINAS VISITOR REPORTEDLY ATTACKED

¶5. (C) In an incident apparently unrelated to the Congress, independent librarian Yunieski Garcia Lopez was reportedly beaten by militants after she visited dissident and former hunger striker Guillermo Farinas at a hospital in Santa Clara. Separately, Roque expressed concern about APSC executive and Congress coordinator Jesus Adolfo Reyes, whose whereabouts are unknown and who is feared to have been detained by police.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The Assembly deserves credit for envisioning, organizing and realizing an event that brings together dissidents and helps them share ideas and subversive materials like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Congress and APSC achieved more on the first day than many opposition groups do in half a year. The event also fills a void after months of dissident quiescence since Fidel Castro's incapacitation. Regarding detractors, it would have been surprising, and completely uncharacteristic of Cuba's

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human rights community, if no one had stepped forward to bad-mouth a rival dissident event.
PARMLY